

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/28/94 PM
Psalm 103:1-5 "The Remedy for Forgetting"

Intro: A couple of weeks ago I got a call from a sales rep with Cincinnati Bell. "We'd like you to sign up with a long distance program we're offering." I listened for awhile. There was one question in my mind, "What are the benefits?"

Suppose you apply for a job. In the interview, the boss covers the expectations of the job, the hours it will take, the experience necessary. Somewhere in the interview, either he brings up the issue, or you do, "What are the benefits of working for this company?" You want to know the benefits before you sign up--what kind of healthy insurance, retirement program, membership at the local racquetball club?!

Let's say you're neighbor who is not a Christian says to you this week, "You know, I can't help but noticing you are a religious person. You go to church several times a week. I never hear you swear. I was wondering, "Why do you do it? Now, I don't want a sermon or anything, but could you tell me this. What are the benefits of Christianity?" Are you prepared to answer your neighbor?

Problem: If we are honest, we tend to forget the benefits of Christianity. The pluses, the privileges, the advantages which are ours because of Christ. We start viewing the Christian life as duty and obligation. When that happens, do you know what the result is? We lose our joy in the Christian life. Don't get me wrong. The Christian life does involve requirements and responsibilities. But it also involves benefits. True, it involves what we must do for God, but we must never lose sight of what God has done for us.

I'm excited about this new series, "The Benefits of Christianity." It will be a topical study of several of the benefits which we possess because we are Christians. These benefits were secured for us by the work of Christ. To name a few: redemption, adoption, justification, sanctification, forgiveness, heaven, atonement, glorification, peace, and the Holy Spirit.

Purpose: The purpose of our series is to discover the meaning and significance of these life-changing benefits which the Bible says are ours because of Jesus Christ.

Key Verse: The key verse for our series is found in the passage we'll be exploring tonight. Ps 103:2 says, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." That's a command, isn't it? Don't forget the benefits of God!

The Israelites did, time and time again, even though God warned them before they ever reached the promised land. Oh, they saw the benefits, but they forgot God (see Dt 6:10-12).

What is the remedy for forgetting? Or stated positively, what is the right way to respond to the benefits of God? We're going to find out tonight as we explore David's counsel in Psalm 103.

Proposition: In Psalm 103:1-5, David lists 5 benefits we enjoy from God.

- I. Benefit #1: Forgiveness of sin (3)
- II. Benefit #2: Healing of diseases (3)
- III. Benefit #3: Redemption of life (4)
- IV. Benefit #4: Crown of love and mercy (4)

V. Benefit #5: Satisfaction with good things (5)

Background: What are the Psalms?

The Psalms were pictures of faith for people who had no copies of the Scriptures in their homes. Psalms is about praise. The collection centers on the praise of God. The Hebrew title (tehillim) means "praises."

What does it mean to praise? According to Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, praise means "to speak well of, to extol the virtues of, to magnify." It comes from the same root as "appraise." When we praise, we are commending the worth of something. When we praise God, we are commending His worth.

That's why we are here tonight, to commend the worth of God. By the way, in the Old Testament, praise is vocal, public, and genuine. The Psalms call us to shout in joy (Ps 100:1), to proclaim (Ps 116:17), to extol (Ps 145:1 lit. "to be high"), to sing (Ps 92:1), and to give thanks (Ps 138:1 lit. "to give public acknowledgement). The Psalms teach us how to praise, and for what to praise.

In Psalm 103, we are commanded to do something else. "Bless the LORD." Five times we are told to bless Him. We know God has blessed us, but how do we bless Him? We find the answer in vv 1-2 of Ps 103.

Ps 103 is Hebrew poetry. As such it uses a device known as "parallelism." In Hebrew parallelism, the lines of the poem complement and contribute to each other.

In v 1 the phrases are complementary. Phrase one says, "Bless the LORD." Phrase two advances that thought by saying, "Bless His holy name." David mentions the holy name of our God 11 times in this psalm. So we bless our God by focusing on His holy character, by commending His worth.

In v 2, however, the phrases are "antithetical," that is, the first phrase is affirmed by the denial of its opposite. "Bless the LORD, O my soul." The opposite, "Forget not all His benefits." To bless means not to forget. Stated positively? To bless means "to remember." We bless God when we turn to God, when we call out to God and joyfully remember that He is the source of all that is truly good in our lives.

Key: We bless God when we identify Him as the source of all our blessing.

What are some examples of blessings? David lists five benefits.

I. Benefit #1: Forgiveness of sin (3)

V 3 "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." God forgives. What an amazing thought! In the OT, this word "forgive" is used of God alone. It means to pardon, both the sin (Ex 34:9) and the sinner (I Kgs 8:50). God has pardoned, so bless Him.

What has He pardoned? David reminds himself, his soul, that God has pardoned "all thine iniquities." This is an interesting Hebrew word. It refers to perversion, crooked behavior, an infraction, even guilt. It also points to the punishment from the guilt. It refers to both the wicked deed, and the consequences of that deed; the sin act, as well as the penalty for the sin. In the OT, a man's act and what happens to him are inter-related. The consequence of sin is guilt. But sin also affects the family, and even the nation.

David knew he was a sinner. You didn't have to convince him of that. That's why he delighted in God. "O Lord, you have forgiven my iniquity! You have set me free from the perversion of sin, and the penalty of sin! So I bless You!"

Here's the first benefit. God has forgiven us. The by-product of forgiveness is what? Freedom. We are free. The weight of sin that once hung around our neck is gone, because of Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the joy you felt when you first experienced God's forgiveness? Forgiven! Set free! Pardoned! What a benefit!

II. Benefit #2: Healing of diseases (3)

V 3 "Who heals all thy diseases." The second benefit grows out of the first. Remember, this is Hebrew parallelism. Physical healing is a tangible result of divine forgiveness. In Mk 2:10-11, Jesus demonstrated He had authority to both forgive sins and heal physical diseases.

"Are you saying that God heals every person He forgives?" Yes, but I didn't say when. We all know that the Bible is full of accounts of followers of God who wrestled with physical ailments (Paul, Epaphroditus, Timothy).

What then is the meaning of this benefit? First, it reminds us that our God is the only true source of true healing (contrary to the advertisements a few years ago of the University of Michigan hospital, "Knowledge heals."). Only God heals. Secondly, we need to realize this. God can heal us now, if He so chooses. Yet even if He does, inevitably, our bodies will die. Our hope is not in this life. One day, the God who heals will give us a body that is whole and healthy, completely so. A glorified body.

So bless Him!

III. Benefit #3: Redemption of life (4)

V 4 "Who redeems thy life from destruction." In Hebrew culture, the kinsman redeemer (as in Ruth) was a relative who rescued his kin from difficulty or danger. In the Old Testament, God is Israel's redeemer. God stands up for His people and vindicates them.

In the OT, God is said to redeem in at least 3 ways:

1. He redeems Israel from the bondage in Egypt (Ex 6:6).
2. He rescues Israel from the exile (Isa 43:1).
3. He redeems individuals from death (Hos 13:14).

Here David is thinking of redemption in the personal sense. "I bless You, Lord, for You reached down and rescued my life from destruction. You saw me when I was helpless and hopeless, in the pit of sin. Your loving hands rescued me. Bless You!"

God has done the same for us, has He not? Eph 1:7 "In whom we have redemption through His blood." When God sent Christ into the world, it was to redeem us, to set us free, to restore us to Himself.

IV. Benefit #4: Crown of love and mercy (4)

V 4 "Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies." The verb "crown" actually means "to surround." We are surrounded by the love and mercy of God. As believers, we are totally secure in God's love in Christ Jesus.

Because of God's mercy, He has not dealt with us as we deserve. David marveled at this thought in vv 10-12, "He has not dealt with us after our sins..." If God dealt with us as we deserved, we would be without hope! But He hasn't.

See: Rom 8:39 (where Paul reflects on this thought)

V. Benefit #5: Satisfaction with good things (5)

V 5 "Who satisfies thy mouth..." Listen. God alone can satisfy the longings and desires of people. He made us. He knows what we truly need. He provides for us what is good. He satisfies.

Do we believe that? Do we really believe that God satisfies? Why, then, do we look for satisfaction in other places?

David says God's satisfaction makes us like the "eagle." This image appears in Isaiah 40:31. That text is the promise to the returning exiles. A long trek was ahead of them. Could they make it? Isaiah says, "If you wait on the Lord, you will be like an eagle in flight. God will renew your strength. He will give you exactly what you need for the task at hand.

So for us. God promises to give us what we need. Strength, comfort, courage, guidance, whatever. He knows our needs. He delights in satisfying us.

Warning: We will never find true satisfaction in life as long as we fail to give God His rightful place in our lives. If you are not satisfied, ask yourself this question, "What place am I giving God in my life? Am I putting Jesus Christ first place in my life?" We will never be satisfied until we do.

Conclusion:

We are a blessed people! The benefits of God are many. We have tasted five tonight. How should we respond? By blessing God with our lips, but most importantly, with our lives. Are you blessing Him? And then, don't forget His benefits.

Imagine for a moment the sounds that will reach the ears of God on a typical Sunday. God will hear our mumbled prayers of thanksgiving for our Sunday feast, and He will hear the crying of a Rwandan baby, whose skeleton shows through its skin. God will hear the pounding of football cleats from stadiums all around the United States, and He will hear the scraping of the hands of Somalian women as they sift through the dust of the ground for any overlooked grain. The Lord will hear the crack of a number-two wood hitting a golf ball from the well-fertilized tees of countless golf courses, and He will hear the voice of a Congo farmer, begging for fertilizer for his crops. He will hear Christians in America complaining because the air conditioning in the church is too breezy, and He will hear lepers in India cry out who have no feeling in their limbs at all. The Lord God will hear saints in the USA complain because the church service lasted an hour and fifteen minutes, and He will hear the groaning of Chinese Christians who want to worship freely, but are forbidden by cruel pagan leaders. And somehow, I do not believe that our God will be pleased with what He hears (adapted from E. Achtemaier).

Friends, we need to learn to bless God for our blessings. We need to learn to forget not all His benefits. We need to start tonight. Some of us need to repent and ask God to forgive us for our ingratitude, for taking His blessings for granted. Then we need to resolve to count our blessings, and "name them one by one." We must not take them for granted. Rather, we must share them with others.